



## October 2020 Report: Rhode Island Review of Overdose Accidental Deaths (ROAD) Team

The ROAD Team at the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) convened in October 2020 to conduct a systematic case review of fatal overdoses that occurred in the state between January 1, 2020 and June 30, 2020. Eight fatal overdose cases were selected during this time period; random sampling was used to minimize selection bias.

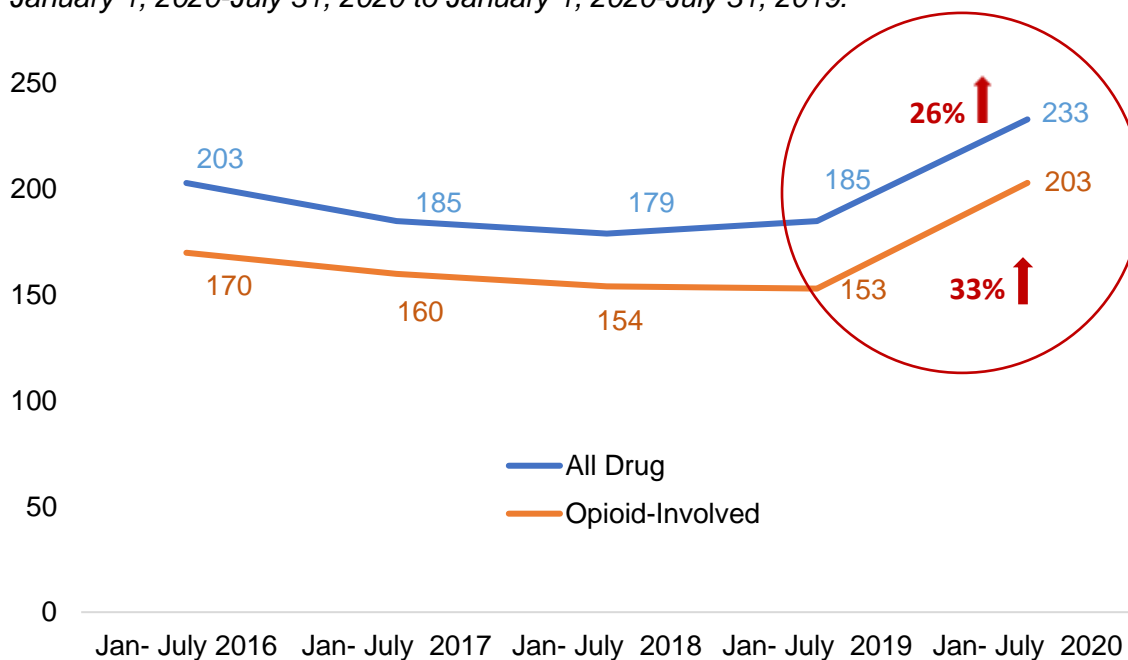
This report offers several community and structural initiatives that can be implemented by state and local partners to prevent the incidence of drug overdose in Rhode Island.

Note: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data analyses from the State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS) were unavailable. Data from the Office of the State Medical Examiners (OSME) and other sources were used to identify emerging overdose death trends.

### Data Trends and Meeting Focus

- Non-fatal and fatal drug overdoses have increased throughout the US in 2020.<sup>1,2</sup>
- From 2016 to 2019, accidental drug overdose deaths occurring in Rhode Island decreased by 8%. In 2020, Rhode Island has experienced increases in drug overdose deaths likely caused by several contributing factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic.
- From January 1, 2020 to July 31, 2020, accidental drug overdose deaths from **all drugs** (i.e., any drug contributed to the death) increased by 26% compared to the same time period in 2019.
- From January 1, 2020 to July 31, 2020, accidental drug overdose deaths in which **any opioid** contributed to the death increased by 33% compared to the same time period in 2019.

**Figure 1.** *Accidental Drug Overdose Deaths Occurring in Rhode Island: Comparison of January 1, 2020-July 31, 2020 to January 1, 2020-July 31, 2019.*



Source: Office of the State Medical Examiners (OSME). Updated as of October 15, 2020.

Notes: Data reflect accidental drug overdose deaths and do not include suicides, homicides, or undetermined deaths. Data reflect deaths occurring in Rhode Island and may include non-Rhode Island residents. Rhode Island residents who died outside of Rhode Island are not included.

## **ROAD Team Recommendations for Community Overdose Prevention**

- Increase promotion of the [Rhode Island Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative](#), particularly within the service and automotive industries.
- Increase public awareness of health risks associated with alcohol consumption and the consumption of alcohol with other substances.
- Increase public awareness of local recovery support services that are available to people with behavioral health conditions. Promote messaging to friends and family members of people with behavioral health conditions.

## **ROAD Team Recommendations for Structural Overdose Prevention**

- Utilize the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training Unemployment Insurance Division to distribute local treatment and recovery support resources to people receiving unemployment benefits.
- Establish uniform protocols for all Rhode Island-based hospital emergency departments for patients presenting with substance use disorders. Protocols include referral to local peer recovery support services, treatment bed facilities for individuals who are from out of state or without health insurance, and transportation services for patients to out-of-state treatment facilities.
- Review current Emergency Medical Services (EMS) protocols in response to suspected opioid overdoses to determine if a naloxone protocol is being followed during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Establish strategies to improve communication between primary care and treatment providers.
- Determine source(s) of inequities in data availability for ROAD meetings, particularly for Latinx individuals. Improve general data collection efforts for all overdose decedents.
- Identify additional data sources to collect and inform systematic ROAD case review.
- Increase participation from the Rhode Island Office of the State Medical Examiners at ROAD meetings and as an expert advisor to the [Governor's Overdose Prevention and Intervention Task Force](#).
- Prioritize the hiring of the vacant Chief Medical Examiner position at the Office of the State Medical Examiners.

## **References:**

1. Katz, J., Goodnough, A., & Sanger-Katz, M. (2020, July 15). [In Shadow of Pandemic, US Drug Overdose Deaths Resurge to Record](#). *New York Times*.
2. Alter, A. & Yeager, C. (2020, June). [COVID-19 Impact on US National Overdose Crisis](#). *Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program*.